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SUBJECT: FRAUD SUMMARY - STOCKHOLM

REF: STOCKHOLM 0224

¶1. Summary: As Sweden prepares to take the June through December 2009 rotational European Union presidency, refugees remain a top priority for the country. Embassy Stockholm continues to deal with Sweden's large population of third country nationals, many with insufficient identification documents and weak ties to Sweden. The ESTA program has also brought more problematic Swedish travelers into the consular section. FPU has taken steps to deal with the daily in-processing demands and is working on developing fraud intelligence products useful for the region. End Summary.

Country Conditions

¶2. Sweden has long been considered a low-fraud post, albeit with some disturbing fraud patterns that may warrant a reclassification. Sweden is a Visa Waiver Program country, so most business and tourist travelers utilize their Swedish passport to travel to the United States. When Swedish passport holders do apply for B1/B2 visas, they are usually looking for extended visits or have been required to do so by the new Electronic System for Travel Advisory (ESTA). Sweden is also home to a diverse population of Third Country Nationals, including one of the largest concentrations of Iraqis and Iranians in Europe. Because of Sweden's relatively liberal refugee and asylum policies, many these refugees receive Swedish citizenship relatively quickly.

¶3. FPU notes that the emerging economic crisis has hit Sweden's manufacturing industries hard. Factory orders have dropped by 95 percent. Thousands of Swedes have been laid off. While the Swedish state's generous unemployment benefits guard against abuse of the Visa Waiver Program, some Swedes will likely be tempted to earn extra money on the U.S. labor black market. More importantly, newer immigrants to Sweden will have an increasingly difficult time entering the Swedish labor market and may seek opportunities in the U.S.

¶4. In the last year, the Swedish Migration Board has become less willing to grant permanent residence to many asylum seekers, particularly Iraqis. In January, the Swedish Migration Board determined that conflict-conditions exist in only five of Iraq's 18 provinces sufficient to merit an asylum claim. Sweden has also hastened the review and appeal process for all asylum seekers, promising higher numbers of deportations in 2009. At the same time, post has seen sustained efforts at all levels of government to integrate new immigrants into the Swedish society and economy. Few other countries can compete with the social support offered by Sweden to new immigrants, which is why Sweden will dedicate a significant portion of its EU Presidency to establishing EU-wide asylum/refugee policies.

NIV Fraud

¶15. Most of the FPU's time is focused on NIV applicants. In FY08, Stockholm adjudicated over 20,509 NIV cases with a refusal rate of 18.50 percent (including 221g refusals). The FPU provides three basic services: pre-checking foreign passports and select applicant categories; consular interview assistance; and referral investigations. During the reporting period, the FPU pre-checked approximately 900 third country NIV applicants. 100 cases were referred to the FPU during or after the interview process, resulting in 17 confirmed cases of NIV fraud and ten outstanding requests for additional documentation from suspect applicants.

¶16. Impact of ESTA. With the implementation of the ESTA for Visa Waiver Country travelers, Post has seen an increase in Swedish citizens with legal issues applying for B1/B2 visas. Many of the ESTA-related cases were triggered because of the applicant's criminal issues, which often leads to FPU assistance. A significant number of ESTA referrals are related to Swedish passports reported lost to police, but subsequently recovered by the owners.

¶17. The Internet is a required tool: One H-1B applicant intended to work for a company with no functioning webpage. Nothing has been heard from the applicant since he was requested to provide additional documentation of the company. Several au pairs that enjoyed their experience attempted to return to the same families while continuing their status as F-1 students. However, their social networking sites and blogs documented their intentions. When Post's Information Management Office needed to block access to Facebook to counter a virus, FPU received one of the only exceptions. Indeed, the Internet is helping to spread the word for Post. In the chat forum of community site 'Resdagboken' (travel diary), an unsuccessful applicant writes a "WARNING TO ILLEGAL AU PAIRS IN THE U.S." in which she describes being subjected to a visa

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ineligibility for her previous illegal work. She also writes compellingly of the dangers of an illegal life in the United States., noting one German au pair who was almost sent to jail for being involved in a car accident. The statement (found on <http://www.resdagboken.se>; see /Default.aspx?DocumentID=229&TopicID=19286) received many comments from visitors to the website forum.

¶18. Iranians and Some Iranian Passports: During the reporting period, Stockholm FPU conducted a validation study of visas issued to Iranian citizens in Stockholm (Reftel). As a summary, Iranian B1/B2 applicants in Stockholm travel in patterns similar to those applicants at Embassy Ankara, especially when considering the relatively economically advantaged applicant pool in Sweden. Post's attention to Iranians revealed an anomaly in certain Iranian passports. Post reviewed an Iranian passport in which the check digits in the Machine Readable Zone (MRZ) did not match up. Post consulted with contacts at the Swedish National Laboratory of Forensic Science and concluded that the passport was genuine. Iranian passport authorities switched the format for date definition in the MRZ from YYMMDD to DDMMYY, but still defined the check digit as calculated on the proper format (YYMMDD), leading to an aberrant check digit result.

¶19. Continued cooperation with DHS: FPU hosted a delegation of DHS officials reviewing Sweden for continued participation in the Visa Waiver Program. As the visit encompassed a wide range of policy and operational offices, FPU found it very productive to be part of the planning process. On a regular basis, FPU liaises with DHS Copenhagen. For example, in February, an applicant came in and applied for a business/tourist visa to "buy cars" in the U.S. An internet search revealed that the applicant was running an extensive business named "Crazy Swedes" out of Virginia for the purchase and refurbishing of cars. In collaborating with DHS Copenhagen, the applicant's partner, already in the U.S. on a B1/B2 visa, is now being pursued by ICE.

¶10. FPU's role with IV applications has steadily increased as Stockholm processes more and more TCN IV and DV applicants. Stockholm approved 250 IVs in FY08. The IV unit has seen a rise in fraudulent IV and K visa cases among a growing number of applications from petitioners and beneficiaries coming from refugee populations from Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. The main areas of concern for the IV are relationship concerns and/or a history of asylum fraud in Sweden and other identity concerns. Nine IV cases were formally referred to the FPU during the reporting period, two of which remain unresolved. The FPU also inspects various identification documents, mostly from Iraqi or North African applicants, on average 1-3 cases per week.

¶11. In both NIV and IV cases, Post continues to find a heightened number of questionably Iraqi passports and other supporting documents. With the IV cases, FPU engages in the time-intensive process of examining third country identification documents. Post works closely with Embassies Amman and Baghdad in addressing these issues.

¶12. FPU has worked on several IV cases where relationship fraud concerns are present, but difficult to prove. Taking additional investigatory steps is very helpful. In one CR1 IV case, FPU needed a lengthy telephone interview to clear up contradictory information.

The applicant aroused suspicion by getting married in a Swedish city hall on the first meeting, despite claiming to deeply religious connection. Lexis Nexis showed that the petitioner had recently declared a bankruptcy, but also purchased a relatively expensive automobile with specialty licenses plates right after getting married. An in-depth telephone interview filled important missing details, including the key fact that she had completed an expensive divorce process that lead to the bankruptcy and that the purchase of the "new" automobile was part of the divorce settlement.

¶13. FPU closely investigated two suspicious employment-based IVs. The first, for an optician, proved to be bona fide after FPU used an occupational questionnaire developed by FPU. However, the second application was for a car mechanic in Silicon Valley and the applicant had spent the last 10 years working as a computer specialist. FPU quickly discovered that the full time position claimed as work experience was, in fact, a few volunteer hours a week in a repair shop. The petition was returned to USCIS for revocation.

DV Fraud

¶14. Stockholm approved 59 DV applications in FY08; only a handful were Swedes. FPU has assisted in identify verification for many of these TCN applicants. Because of the late interviewing scheduling

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date, many DV applicants lack some of the basic identification documents or the time to make the necessary replacements from their homeland.

ACS and U.S. Passport Fraud

¶15. In the fall of 2008, Stockholm began using a four part fraud indicator checklist in processing ACS cases. The indicators include a record of lost or stolen passports, damaged or altered identity documents, unusual interpersonal behavior, and/or questionable signatures. FPU reviews approximately 4-7 ACS cases per week based on these indicators and conducts an average of one ACS fraud interview per week.

¶16. No Delays with the Federal Aviation Administration. One ACS case involved an applicant showing his time of residence in the United States through his student records as a flight student. The FAA gladly assisted FPU in confirming the applicant's test scores.

¶17. Using the right calendar: In one CRBA application, a naturalized Iranian born Amcit father sported an incorrect date of birth. When he submitted his original birth certificate, his translator only translated the year, forgetting about the differences between the traditional Persian and Standard Western calendars.

Adoption Fraud

¶18. Post has had no adoption cases in this reporting period.

Use of DNA Testing

¶19. Post has utilized DNA testing for DV and some ACS cases, with no cases in the reporting period. Overall, our experience has been positive. When we have processed sufficient numbers in FY09, FPU will conduct a review of our process.

Asylum and other DHS benefit Fraud

¶20. Although post has no fraud to report, Post's increasing number of Iraqi translator visa applications has demanded an increasing amount of attention from FPU. FPU works closely with Embassy Baghdad to confirm identification documents and often returns security badges retained by former State Department and Department of Defense workers. Even with Embassy Baghdad's support, Post often has a difficult time verifying prior employment in Iraq or other claims.

Alien Smuggling, Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Terrorist Travel

¶21. Sweden is often regarded as a transit center for Eastern European trafficking rings to other European countries, but not to North America. However, Swedish authorities are highly focused on combating sex trafficking. Sweden is a destination country for refugees. To date, FPU has detected no systematic effort to use Sweden as a transit to the United States. Although limited in travel funds, FPU has made an effort to visit immigrant-intensive communities to better understand those populations. In November, FPM visited the Migration Board office in Helsingborg, which hosts a large number of Sweden's newest Muslim immigrants and quietly toured the immigrant-centered suburb of Rosengard, near Malmo.

¶22. There are false document production rings in Sweden that are targeting Swedish authorities and many Iraqis also utilize false documents in order to get to Sweden. Some of these falsified documents pass through the Embassy, but more importantly, the Swedish identification documents are more often used in applying for United States visas. A typical Iraqi refugee will pay money to be smuggled to Copenhagen, often via Turkey using the authentic passport of an Iraqi-Swedish or Iraqi-UK citizen. The subject returns the false documents to the smuggler travelling with him or her and then enters Sweden without identification papers on a train.

¶23. Czech Passport Ring in Malmo: Post has encountered two reports of fraudulent Czech passports that may have been procured in Malmo, Sweden. In December 2008, FPU detected a page-substituted Czech passport used by an Uzbek nonimmigrant visa applicant. The applicant admitted having bought the passport from a Russian friend in Stockholm and intimated a connection to Russian organized crime.

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With the assistance of the RSO, the applicant was arrested by Swedish police. When Consulate General Amsterdam reported on the arrest of a U.S. citizen having attempted to travel on a forged Czech passport in January, Stockholm made contact to attempt to help Swedish and Dutch police to work together to compare the two fraudulent passports. The American is well known to Post, as he escaped from a Swedish jail several months ago.

DS Criminal Fraud Investigations

¶24. Post has no pending DS criminal investigations. Cooperation with the RSO has been excellent.

Swedish Passport, Identity Documents, and Civil Registry

¶125. Sweden issues EU-compliant passports. FPU has previously documented the Swedish government's relaxed attitude about identity requirements for refugees. In the case of refugees who have obtained Swedish citizenship, FPU never relies on the Swedish passport as sufficient proof of identity. In the case of refugees with permanent residency in Sweden, FPU notes that an "identity not confirmed" is used by the Swedish authorities when original birth documents are not presented, which are rarely subjected to serious scrutiny otherwise. FPU also notes that Swedish migration authorities have become more rigorous in their identification requirement for asylum-seekers.

Cooperation with Host Government Authorities

¶126. Sweden's privacy rules restrict the sharing of most personal information about Swedish citizens and residents by Swedish law enforcement. Nevertheless, the Swedish authorities work very hard within the constraints of the Swedish legal system to be of assistance to FPU inquiries. FPU has good relationships with all of the major migration and law enforcement authorities and continues to develop contacts. In the reporting period, FPU has made especially helpful contacts with Swedish document analysts.

Staffing and Training and Outreach

¶127. The FPU consists of one part-time Fraud Prevention Manager and one full-time LES Fraud Investigator with significant non-FPU duties in the NIV section. The current FPM, Dan Mangis, arrived at Post in August 2008. He serves as the Deputy Consul and manages the IV Unit. The FI, Marten Sandmark, also has significant responsibilities in the NIV Unit. These responsibilities limit the FPU's ability to do field work, which is a concern for Post. Post has trained a backup Fraud Investigator, Maria Sederholm in order to free additional time for fraud analysis projects, particularly relating to regional issues and trends. Both the present FPM and Mr. Sandmark have taken all of FSI's available fraud training courses. When practical, FPU will nominate backup Fraud Investigator Ms. Sederholm for fraud training.

¶128. Reaching out to other Posts: FPU hopes to attend a regional fraud conference in the next few months and/or coordinate an onsite consultation with a larger consular post. In the meanwhile, Mr. Sandmark participated in an innovative "chat conference" with other EUR LES fraud investigators in order to develop cost-efficient ways to collaborate with other posts. Post is looking for opportunities to work on regional validation studies, especially for populations in the Nordic/Baltic region.

SILVERMAN